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HAWTHORNDEN

A STORY OF EVERY DAY LIFE

BY MRS. CLARA M. THOMPSON

CHAPTER XXXII.

FINALE

The sun rose brightly on the second day of October, the Feast of the Holy Guardian Angels, shining through the purple haze of autumn, and tinting with rosy fingers the scattering clouds of vapor that lingered near the horizon. The high altar in the Church of Our Lady of Angels was decorated with rare and beautiful flowers. The usual hour of the morning Sacrifice had been a little delayed for the administering of another Sacrament, Harry Greenwood and his bride knelt in devotion before that altar, offering to God the vows they were there to make; while Captain Hartland and his restored wife bent the knees with the bridal party, and as the priest, receiving the ring from the bridegroom, placed it upon the proper finger of the bride, Aleck Hartland, unsmiling, slipped the bright circle on, had so long worn with a heavy heart, upon the finger of his wife, now nearer and dearer to him than ever. Mass for a newly married pair was celebrated, Harry and Rosine still worshipping at that altar, where they together received the Living Bread, while at the conclusion of the services, Father Roberts pronounced the solemn nuptial benediction. It was a peaceful, holy scene, where the joy of earth mingled with the blessed hopes of heaven, not a jarring thought, not a passing shadow even on those young hearts, here pledged to each other, and together to their dear present Lord, for all time and eternity. Marion had contrived to steal from her princely home with the little Lily, to witness a ceremony that recalled to her only weary, heart-saddening memories. Mr. Benton could not be persuaded to come to town for even this occasion; but the mother was with the beloved daughter, Colonel Hartland gave away the bride, the little Philomena, now a fine grown girl, standing as bride's maid, while Harold had come all the way from St. Louis, as he asserted again, and again, solely to do his duty as "best man."

no pleasure now but Aleck's wishes, and the tiny cottage below the lawn was a home of sweet content, made sweeter by grateful loving hearts, that had both drunk deeply of the bitter cup of sorrow. The young growing parish at Hawthornden, with its increasing numbers, afforded a field for Laura's energies, so freely employed at the Home of the Orphans, and the poor and the sick, the desolate and forsaken, found in her a friend and helper, — and she had the pleasure in time of marking a growing interest in these things in her husband's heart. Willie, the dear blind boy, was at first a little grieved and sensitive about Mrs. Hartland coming as she did between him and the dearest love and fondest care of the Captain, but Laura's affectionate nature soon won the boy to herself, and in the end he came back to his own little room in the cottage, and was quite as much at home there as at his grandfathers. Philomena Nelson, or "Mina," as she was called, had been his playmate, but she was now gone back to her brother; much to the regret of Laura, who, though older, (now her heart was at rest), was no graver than the sedate little girl, and they had become the fondest of friends.

Dear, patient reader, you who have kindly travelled through so many years with me, shall I implore the romance of this story, founded on unquestionable fact, by bringing down my living heroes and heroines to this gracious year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-five? or shall I leave the remainder of their lives to your fertile imagination? Preferring the latter you can here close the book, leaving these few last pages for the prosaic eyes of your Uncles and Aunts.

Dear Hawthornden! lovely, unsurpassed as ever, with thy verdant hill tops crowned with the rich and varied hues of autumn tide! Time, the great innovator, has wonderfully spared the beauties of this lovely region. The village has not developed into a country town, the same undisturbed quiet lanes open their stores of beauty to the eye and to the heart of the seeker. The mighty steam power has not dared to invade these hills, but ab, in the distant valley, ay, in the very shadow of "Paradise," and "Purgatory," the fire-horse darts through the embowered beauties of "Sunny Nook," friendly hands sought to save from desecration this well-beloved spot, but railroad corporations have, no souls.

Hawthornden boasts now no hotel, all the business of the region crowding toward the valleys, consequently the multitudes of summer strangers from the cities, who import into our plain country home their artificial town customs, and laugh at our rural habits, are but just beginning to find out our snug quarters. But our early friends from the city, linked by ties of blood and friendship with the Hawthorne estate, have never forsaken lovely Hawthornden. In the old mansion, Philip Benton and his wife, in "gentle life's descent," wit hand in hand their summons: full of peace and calm joy, their last days happiest. Our kind-hearted Colonel, on the retired list of his country's servants, passes his time between his two homes, equally at hand quarters in town or country.

In the year of our Lord above named, on such a morning "yellow clad autumn," our Rosine, stood where she stood on well-remembered June day long ago, when she pointed out to Mr. Greenwood, for the first time, the beauties of that loved spot. Harry is by her side, they are many years older, but the fresh, kindly look that never grows old, shines from both their faces; his bearing expresses always that same deferential admiration of his wife, which says so plainly, "The heart of her husband trusteth in her." They are prolonging the vacation from their busy town life for their children's sake; they are now watching a party on the lawn, earnestly engaged in a game of croquet. I speak advisedly when I say "earnestly," for persons never in earnest elsewhere are aroused to energy here. Beyond the band of players, two ladies of mature age are also watching intently the neatly completed game. Down go the mallets at length, the winning party running to the veranda. A blooming young girl was the first to reach the destination and bring the news. "There, mamma," exclaims the little Hobe, addressing Rosine, "Uncle Ned and I beat Uncle Aleck and Cousin Lily."

"Yes, Isa, we did it handsomely. Comp, sit on my knee; chairs seem to be a scarce article in these quarters." "At once we are, carried back to the voice and manner of our old friend, Dr. Hartland, now considerably past middle age, but as erect in his carriage, and curt in his speech as erst. "I want come if you call me I — sy," replied the pouting young damsel, prawling out the name. "Well, Dora then; Isadora, my beloved, will you condescend to meet yourself in these arms?" Then began a tussle, and the bird was at length captured by the all-conquering Doctor; evidently very glad was the Miss of her seat on his knee.

"Has anybody told you the news, Harry?" he said, when the little lady had fixed herself to her mind; turning to the father and mother who watched with delight the fond

friendship ripening each day between dear old Ned and their first-born darling. "I saw by the Times last week (I don't suppose you read newspapers in this hermitage) that Leighton's brigade, which includes Harold's regiment, were all ordered out; a very sensible arrangement in the Department, as most of the soldiers belong west of the Mississippi. Father is as pleased with the uncommon praise they shower on this brigade as if his own were the commanding officer."

"Yes," replied Mr. Greenwood, no brigade has seen more constant, active, honorable service than this, and the Heads of the Department make special mention of General Leighton and Colonel Benton. I suppose Harold will be ready to marry now, you know her?" "Yes, Dora dear," interrupted the Doctor, "you will have a real live fighting Colonel all to yourself for awhile, who will play croquet with you all day long."

"O, that will be much nicer than 'old Uncle Ned'!" cried the child, giving his hair a smart pull as he pinched her blooming cheek. "But he's going to be married," he retorted, "and will care no more for you."

"Dora knows better than that," said the Mother. "Uncle Harold's heart is a large one; but did you know, Ned, the marriage may be here? Father Nelson has been ordered by his physicians, as well as his superiors, to try a change of climate, and he is to bring his sister with him. His health is much broken, and papa hopes to persuade him to rest here this winter, and we all think perhaps you may be able to help him."

Doctor Hartland shook his head. "No, hope for a Catholic priest," he said. "If he once begins to run down, for they will not stop work. I have had several on my hands — never succeeded in saving one."

There was a grave pause for a moment when Mr. Greenwood remarked: "Then we may really have a wedding in our midst before we think of it. I'm sure the young couple have waited patiently for this cruel war to be over."

"A double wedding, possibly!" said the Doctor, shrugging his shoulders, and elevating his eyebrows as of old, when the lady in black approached the veranda with her companion. "What, are you going to be married Uncle?" inquired the playful, teasing child, who still held her position on his knee. "No, darling," he replied; "I'm waiting for you, so make haste and grow up."

"Indeed!" she said pertly, drawing herself up. "I guess it isn't right to marry under such circumstances. Roberts says cousins mustn't marry."

"Little pitchers!" whispered the Doctor, in quite too serious a tone; for the small miss jumped from her seat with a great frown on her face, and ran to meet her Aunt Marion. There was a very sweet, subdued face under that widow's cap; ten years of heavy cross-bearing had graven their lines on her cheek; she was still the elegant, graceful Mrs. Stapleton, with money and servants at command, but in the early stamping out of her earthly ambition by the heat of shame and sorrow, like those plants that give out sweetest odors when crushed, her better nature had revived, and she had learned through much tribulation, that there are nobler ends in life than the applause or envy of the world; in training her little Lily came many a lesson to her own aching heart, and in teaching her infant lips to pray, she had learned the use of this, the human soul's most powerful weapon. Past suffering was written on her brow, but more plainly was given out her warm sympathy for suffering in others. She had made many dear friends, but like all true souls, the earliest wept the best loved. A week at Hawthornden with her daughter, who in spite of Dr. Hartland's prophecy of early death, had grown into a quiet, lovely young woman, brought to Marion more of happiness than years of style and splendor in the city. Mr. Stapleton had died after a lingering illness, leaving in his will development of his meanness which he had never displayed during his life. The widow who had so faithfully tended his days and nights of terror, and wasted her bloom in efforts to chase away the phantoms that surrounded him, was left the recipient of all his wealth with this restriction, she was always to remain his widow; failing this, his riches were placed in trust for his child. Such things are; but if any man wishes his name branded with odium, let him go and do likewise.

at her keenly, with his finger on his lip. "What can they mean?" she thought. Her question seemed for a moment to damp the whole company, save Laura and Marion; they mused away together, in quiet, dreamy ways, apparently uninterested, or unnoticed, the thought that had sealed the mouths of the rest of the company. At length Mrs. Stapleton seemed to awaken to a new impression.

"Did you say Harold comes tonight, and Philomena and Father Nelson next week? Then I suppose comes the wedding. I wish I might stay, but it is time Lily was at her books again."

"Marion, my child!" spoke the clear, full voice of Philip Benton, who had joined the group. "You keep Lily too closely to her studies; a month longer out of school will be a blessing to her; you know her cough is not gone — you must be careful of our delicate casket."

The fair young creature rested her head on his breast, and whispered, "Dear Grandpapa."

"Besides," added Mrs. Benton, mildly, yet decidedly, "you know, Marion, that Mina has the promise of Lily and Isadora for bridesmaids."

Harold did not come that night; weary eyes kept vigil till near dawn, but there was no arrival. About sunrise the next morning, two gentlemen on foot came brushing through the woods that skirted the Hawthorne estate; the family had sunk into that heavy slumber which succeeds watching, save Marion; her years of restless life had made her a light sleeper, and she had gone forth for the early morning air. She was in the garden, gathering the few lilies and asters which the frost had spared for her mother's oratory; she was stooping over a Neapolitan violet, to find the hidden prize which betrayed itself by its precious perfume, when a soldier knelt by her side, his arms about her neck.

"Why, Harold, how you frightened me! Did you drop from the skies, or come up from a lower sphere?" she exclaimed, raising herself and adjusting the curls which had been loosened from their hiding-place by his embrace.

"Well, I came from New York last, and they say that isn't far from the lower sphere; but here is my friend, I came near forgetting him — General Leighton." He darted off, as he pronounced the name, leaving Marion transfixed with astonishment; some one raised her eyes, and she looked, but let the flowers she had gathered drop from her fingers.

"Allow me," said the General, in a low, well-remembered tone, stooping for her fallen treasures, and seeing her utter want of self-possession; so different from the old self-assured way. It would not have been possible for Marion to have reached the house at that moment; all fortitude had forsaken her, all the process and heroicism that had dared for so many years to stand before the specters, quailed before this presence, that had burst upon her like a thunderbolt. Most heartily ashamed of herself for this exhibition of cowardice, she would gladly have hidden where no eye could look upon her shame. But the true heart near her, saw through all; he had borne the most bitter wrong from her, and never transferred the love he had given, to any other. Once in years long passed, he had been sorely spell-roved, her that she would have him had he yielded, but he put aside the thought and remained faithful to his early spoken vows. Honor he had won; both civil and military honors had been heaped upon him; reputation, but not wealth. He had often heard through others of Marion's bitter life draught; and on the eve of his first battle he heard from a brother officer of her release from the dreadful slavery of an unloving, unloved wife; then he had made his own resolve, that if the end of the warfare found him living, his first thought should be for her. It was in that morning encounter, among the thick falling leaves and desolate remnants of the flower garden, that Marion learned the depth of the wrong she had done Horatio Leighton; and it was there she gave up wealth and all that riches can purchase, for one loving heart.

Thus came the fulfillment of Edward Hartland's prophecy; for at the Festival of All Saints, Father Nelson, with the permission of the parish priest, administered the sacrament of marriage; to four of his "dear children," as he called them. This was his last official act; his untiring efforts for the flock over which the Good Shepherd had placed him, with his life of penance and fasting, had worn out a frame not the most robust. He had not strength to return to his post, as he had intended, after caring for his sister. On Christmas morning, as the children in the far west, whom he had gathered into the Association of the Holy Childhood, were chanting the cantata he had taught them, he fell asleep in Jesus; resting in the arms of his long-tried constant friend, Philip Benton.

THE END

By work one secures one's self to a severe and active life, and the character gains as much by it as the mind. — Ozaanam. I am sure that no man can know peace who has not come through storm. Peace follows battle. It draws its meaning from contest. And, oh, how inestimable the delight when the clouds break and the sunshine gleams forth!

THE SHADOW OF THE FLAG

When he was a little boy and went to the children's Mass his seat was right under the tall, stained-glass window of the Holy House at Nazareth. At one side of the picture stood St. Joseph at work with his carpenter's tools; on the other, in the background, was the Blessed Mother; and in front of her, seated on a rough bench, was the Divine Child, holding in His hands a cross that He had just fashioned out of pieces of wood picked up from the floor of the workshop. On His face was a look of innocent wonder as He gazed at the work of His hands. What did it mean? Had its purpose yet been revealed to Him? His mother's look was one of brooding contemplation, as if she would fain look into the future and understand that which, in the quiet and solitude of Nazareth, had not yet pierced her heart.

As the boy grew older and came to Mass with his mother instead of with the children, he began to sense the beauty of the window and all that it meant of home and sacrifice. And sometimes he drew a little closer to his mother, for, the future, when he might have to leave her, seemed very vast indeed.

Then, one day when he was fifteen and had graduated from grammar school, his mother called him to her and asked him if he had thought of his future and what he would like to be.

"I want to be a carpenter," said the boy, "like St. Joseph. I was born on his feast, mother, and named for him, and you know I have always loved to play with bits of wood and carpenter's tools."

The mother was well satisfied that it should be so, and very soon the boy's father had apprenticed him to a large firm of carpenters, and he entered upon his work with a will, eager to learn all that his trade could teach him.

Because he was clever and possessed, all unknown to himself, great natural gifts as a wood carver he began in his spare hours to fashion beautiful things out of pieces of wood.

When the boy was seventeen a wealthy and generous member of the congregation presented the church a flag. A pole was erected on a piece of land that lay between the church and the parish school and one lovely Saturday in May the pastor, with the school children, the donor and many of the congregation, assembled for the ceremony of the raising of the flag.

The boy had been chosen to run the flag up the pole, and after the singing of patriotic songs by the children and a short address by the pastor came the breathless moment when, with vigorous pulls of his strong arms, the flag climbed the pole until it had reached the top, where a breeze from the south unfurled it and floated it proudly in the face of the wind. Splendidly it stood out to view, and off came the boys' caps while a shout went up from the boys and girls alike.

Passing automobiles paused and the occupant of one addressed the priest. "You have a very patriotic parish, Father," he said. "I have tried to teach the children their duty," answered the pastor. "And you have evidently succeeded. If your own Father, if my war comes to our country I shall look to you for recruits."

The visitor stepped into his automobile and sped away. The priest glanced at the card and uttered an exclamation. "Children," he said, "that was General Walker. Think of his passing by just as we were unfurling our flag."

The children knew the name and an "Oh!" of wonder and delight ran through their ranks. What added luster it lent to their flag-raising, that one of the greatest generals in the world had taken part in it!

The next day was Sunday. As the boy took his seat for Mass he glanced up at the beautiful window. Unconsciously, he started at the change that had taken place there. The sun still shone through its delicate tints, but not as before. Now and then, as the south wind unfurled the flag, spreading out its folds to the breeze, its shadows fell athwart the window, casting a dark veil across its gleaming surface. The boy noticed that the outline of the flag was sharply defined so that the cross was always in the sun while the shadows passed over the thoughtful face of St. Joseph; the brooding, tender one of the Blessed Mother; and the spiritual wondering features of the Divine Child.

went hand in hand. The Cross and the flag had conquered the world to Christ, and they must be symbols of order still.

"We cannot escape it," he said. "The flag of our country overshadows every home in the land; the Cross of Calvary which stands ever in the sun and is placed high above the world points the way."

"The boy listened with parted lips, his clear eyes fixed now on the priest, now on the window where gleamed the cross in the hands of the Child, and the color came and went in his face. Would the opportunity to serve his country, through the Cross, ever be his? He thought of it still during the singing of the Sanctus. It would be a holy thing to fight for a great cause.

And all too soon the opportunity came, and the heart of his mother was pierced as with a sword. Two months after the flag raising at the little church the Great War began, and less than three years later, when the boy was twenty years old, the United States also declared war and without waiting until he was old enough for the draft, he enlisted.

Proudly his mother told him he might go, even though her heart was breaking. He was her only son, and therefore doubly dear. But she knew she was not alone in her sacrifice. That other Mother who dwelt in the Holy House of Nazareth had also given an only Son, and had pointed the path of utter self-renunciation to all mothers to come.

Before he left Chicago for Camp Grant the boy's mother called him to her, and taking from around her neck a slender silver chain that he had hung day and night inside her dress she fastened it around his firm, finely-molded young throat. Suspended from the chain was a small crucifix three inches in length, carved with exquisite beauty and skill. The boy had made it himself from a piece of mesquite wood that a young soldier friend had brought from Mexico.

Small as was the crucifix, every detail of the face and hands and feet were carved so perfectly that they seemed to breathe with life. It was a thing of beauty and placed the boy among the master craftsmen of the world.

"I want you to have this," the mother said. "It will be your talisman, my boy."

And he had put his arms around her and kissed her, as some sons are not ashamed to kiss the mothers they dearly love.

Then came months of hard work and training, and because his heart was in it the boy worked with a will and so rapidly did he learn that in the autumn he was among the first to be sent to France.

There was one brief hour with his mother in Chicago before he joined his regiment, bound for an Atlantic port. Short as the time was, they went together to the church and knelt in their old places near the shining window, and the boy looked at the shining cross in the hands of the Child and then his own strong brown fingers felt through his knelt for the crucifix that day and night lay near his heart. And he prayed that he might be worthy of his calling amid the manifold temptations of a soldier's life.

Late one afternoon in February General Dillon, surrounded by his staff, was seated at a large table with maps and plans spread out before him. Placing his pencil on a spot near the center of the map the General turned to his side.

"For weeks," he said, "this farmhouse, strongly held and well fortified, has stood in the way of our advance. Time after time it has been stormed without avail. What force has failed to accomplish we must now try to obtain by strategy."

A murmur of assent ran through the ranks of the listening officers. "This farm," continued the General, "is out of range of our artillery. It stands on the summit of a hill and behind the apex of a solid rock formation. Less than a quarter of a mile further back there are two crossroads that it is essential we should command in order to advance and take the city ten miles beyond. Once we gain the objective we will dominate the country for miles around, so its strategic value is enormous."

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